TRUSTWORTHY COMMUNICATION:
Use of Statistics and Data in Government Communications

Suzanne Halls
October 2023
Outline

The role of OSR

Intelligent Transparency in Communications

Collaboration between analysis and communications functions
Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR)

- The regulatory arm of the UK Statistics Authority – we regulate official statistics across the UK Statistical System

- Promote and safeguard the production and publication of official statistics

- Independent of official statistics producers - we do not produce statistics and are separate from the Office for National Statistics (ONS)
UK Statistical System

Parliamentary Bodies

UK Statistics Authority:
Chair and Authority Board

National Statistician
Official Statistics production

ONS
Government departments and agencies
Scottish Government
Welsh Government
NI Executive

Director General
Regulation
Office for Statistics Regulation

User communities: meeting the public good
Our vision is that statistics serve the public good

In a world of abundant data, we want people to have confidence in statistics produced by the public sector
The Code of Practice for Statistics

Trustworthiness
Confidence in the people and organisations that produce statistics

- Honesty & integrity
- Independent decision making & leadership
- Orderly release
- Transparent processes & management
- Professional capability
- Data governance

Quality
Data and methods that produce assured statistics

- Suitable data sources
- Sound methods
- Assured quality

Value
Statistics that support society’s needs for information

- Relevance to users
- Accessibility
- Clarity & insight
- Innovation & improvement
- Efficiency & proportionality
Giraffes

Have we got a plan for publishing these numbers?

Don’t worry - they won't get used publicly. No one will be interested, it was only a quick analysis anyway.
My officials estimate 324 giraffes escaped from zoos
What has been included in the figure?

Where did that figure come from?

Is that England, the UK or the world?

What time period does it cover?
This isn't good enough let's ask the statistics watchdog for help!

@statsregulation we can't find data to support claims about the number of giraffes escaping from zoos
Ed Humpherson to Simon Palmer: Police funding infographic for Beating Crime Plan

Dear Simon

Police funding infographic for Beating Crime Plan

I am writing regarding a statement issued on Twitter on December 16 showing overall annual police funding.

The data are shown in nominal rather than real terms. Providing data in nominal terms gives the impression of a greater increase in police funding over time than would be seen if using real terms figures. While real terms figures would give a better sense of the increase felt by police forces, we recognise that real terms figures are not produced until July. Given the potential to mislead, the tweet should be clearer that the data are in nominal terms, and therefore do not take account of the changing value of money over time. Presenting the data without showing the full axis from zero also contributes to the impression of a greater increase.

Ed Humpherson to Peter Schofield: Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) Way to Work target and use of figures by government

Dear Peter

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) Way to Work target and use of figures by government

In January 2022, DWP set a target to move 500,000 people into employment from Universal Credit Intensive Work Search or Job Seekers Allowance.

On the 30 June, DWP posted a tweet and press release claiming that over half a million people have been helped into work by the Way to Work campaign in 5 months, therefore reaching the above target. This figure was subsequently quoted in the House of Commons by the Prime Minister on 6 July.
Trustworthiness is at the core of what we do

How statistics are produced
We uphold the trustworthiness, quality and value of statistics and data used as evidence

How statistics are used
We protect the role of statistics in public debate

How statistics are valued
We develop a better understanding of the public good of statistics
Intelligent Transparency

Proactively taking an open, clear and accessible approach to the publication of data, statistics and wider analysis

**Equality of access**

Data used by government in the public domain should be made available to all in an accessible and timely way.

**Enhancing understanding**

Sources for figures should be cited and appropriate explanation of context, including strengths and limitations, communicated clearly alongside figures.

**Independent Decision Making and Leadership**

Decisions about the publication of statistics and data, such as content and timing, should be independent of political influence.
Benefits

• Public conversations focus on the important issues — rather than about a lack of transparency which can result in confusion about where numbers come from or accusations that governments cherry pick or manipulate data.

• Organisations which communicate using data and statistics demonstrate trustworthiness.
The importance of collaboration for trustworthy communication
Top tips for trustworthy communication

1. **Speak to your Head of Profession for Statistics, or other analytical colleagues**, for advice on how to present numbers fairly in any external communications

2. Check whether the figures you are using are already **available in the public domain** and make sure you provide a **source**

3. Find out if there are any important **caveats or limitations** which should be highlighted alongside the figures

4. For **infographics or visuals**, can they be understood when viewed in isolation?
Official stop and search figures published with 'dodgy' warning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>E</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>G</th>
<th>H</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Resultant arrests</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For offensive weapons</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>485</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>356</td>
<td>2,143</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>299</td>
<td>1,248</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>256</td>
<td>958</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>1,522</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Author: Reason for arrest data is dodgy so maybe we shouldn’t publish it.
So back to those giraffes...

Have we got a plan for publishing these numbers?

Yes, we have prepared an ad hoc release to go out at the same time as we announce the figures.

Analysis released today shows that over the last 12 months 324 giraffes escaped from zoos across England. You can find more information in our ad hoc release on our website.

Did you hear about those giraffes?

Yes! I looked at the data for my nearest zoo and saw 14 giraffes had escaped!

OSR welcomes the release of the data on escaped giraffes. Given the public interest we would ask @Zoopartment to consider the need for a regular output.
Supporting trustworthy communication

We have resources to help support impactful communications:

• We have created senior leader and a comms specific Code guidance note

• Our staff write blogs to help communicators eg – Talking Numbers and Making Them Count

• We also host annual awards with the Royal Statistical Society and Civil Service World, to recognise good practice in official statistics and promote voluntary adoption of TQV
Let’s continue the conversation

Find out more and get in touch:
OSR website: https://osr.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/
Contact us: Suzanne.halls@statistics.gov.uk
Find us on Twitter: @StatsRegulation